



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes **with amendments as approved at August 10th meeting**
July 13, 2010 – 7:30pm

Attendance

Commission Members: Daphne Collins (Chair), Jack Leader (Secretary), Jerry Adams, Charles Eisenberg, Bruce A. Gold, Jane Ives, John Pears, Carol Ann Shea, Chris Steele

Staff: Amanda Stout (Sr. Economic Development Planner)

Guests: Bill Renke, Ald. Ruthanne Fuller

Absent: Philip Plottel (Vice Chair), Matt Cuddy, Robert Gifford, Peter Kai Jung Lew

Agenda Items

1. EDC Opinion on Economic Development Proposal – Pie/Continental (796 Beacon Street)

- Discussion of that evening's Public Hearing before the Land Use Committee: Petition #151-10, PIE LLC d/b/a CONTINENTAL for a SPECIAL PERMIT/SITE PLAN APPROVAL to waive 9 parking spaces in order to expand an existing 24-seat café to a 48-seat restaurant at 796 Beacon Street, Ward 6, Newton Centre. In advance of the meeting, EDC members were provided with a copy of the Planning and Development Department's staff report on the project.
- Comments on staff report: qualitatively the report shows that the area needs more parking, but there is no quantitative data and the report alludes to recent studies that show that there is more than enough parking; appreciated the references to the fact that this project is consistent with both the Comprehensive Plan and with the Newton Centre Task Force Final Report.
- The EDC has concerns about the current ad-hoc system of mitigation and appreciates the need for parking structures and a formal "fee in-lieu parking" system, but there are significant questions and concern about what the policy should be in the meantime.
- There was concern about putting undue costs on small restaurants that can't afford them, particularly since restaurants are risky ventures in and of themselves.
- Action: The EDC voted to support a temporary waiver of 9 parking spaces as requested by the applicant and further recommended that if and when a parking structure is built in Newton Centre, the applicant should rent 9 spaces in the garage, but do not support financial exactions on applicant in the meantime.
- On request of Daphne Collins for a motion to approve, Jack Leader so moved. Chris Steele seconded the motion. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion and send Chuck Eisenberg down the hall to the Aldermanic Chamber to deliver EDC comments to the Land Use Committee.
- Chuck Eisenberg reported that approximately 20 people were at the Public Hearing. Ald. Mitch Fischman articulated the difference between exactions and mitigation; he said that Panera's contribution to pay for a traffic signal, for example, was not an arbitrary exaction, but rather a specific mitigation that had been negotiated as part of the special permit process. Ald. Ted Hess-Mahan said that the Land Use Committee would suggest that ZAP consider the issue of setting a standard policy regarding financial impacts of applicants. The applicant plans for the new restaurant to be open until midnight on weekends. [Note: please refer to the official Report of the Public Hearing for more detailed information: <http://www.ci.newton.ma.us/Aldermen/Agendas/LandAgenda.htm>]



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2. Other restaurant updates

- Jack Leader reported that he was pleased to see that the Deluxe Diner was mentioned in the Improper Bostonian magazine as one of the area's best diners and the article mentioned that they are opening a second diner in Newton Centre in the fall.
- Amanda Stout reported that another restaurant had recently had a Public Hearing before the Land Use Committee: Petition #140-10, Fiorella's (187 North Street) seeks a special permit to expand an existing restaurant from 64 to 114 seats and waive the side setback requirement for a parking facility of greater than five stalls.
- In the future, Amanda will keep the commission abreast of restaurant and other economic development petitions that might warrant comment from the EDC.

3. Vote on June 8th Minutes

- Members wanted to reiterate and strengthen the amendment to the June 8th minutes, which referred to a discussion in the May 11th minutes, in which the EDC expressed "strong condemnation" of the Riverside projects in its current iteration. Commission members felt "permanent underdevelopment" of the site would deprive the site and City of future benefits.
- On request of Daphne for a motion to approve the June 8th minutes, Carol Ann Shea so moved. John Pears seconded the motion. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion.

4. Mixed-Use Task Force and Finance

- Chuck Eisenberg, Jerry Adams, and John Pears updated the EDC on the progress of the Task Force. The Task Force is currently looking at a 3-tiered structure: first a general policy update to the *Comprehensive Plan*, second a philosophical level that still takes a general view of the City as a whole, and third a project-specific or site-specific level including review by the Board of Aldermen. One objective of this scheme and of the Task Force is to take a city-wide, rather than parochial view, of large mixed-use projects. While these guidelines will focus on large mixed-use development (greater than 10 acres; namely, Riverside, Chestnut Hill Square, and the Northland site on Needham Street), any developer could theoretically choose to use this scheme rather than the underlying zoning. These new guidelines will be designed to offer incentives to developers; one incentive is the assurance and predictability that come with being able to go before the Board of Aldermen with an established set of criteria that the Board will legitimately weigh.
- John Pears noted that, as defined by the Task Force, a mixed-use project in Newton must have housing. There have been discussions among the Task Force about proximity and interface and the fact that a new project could look to existing housing in the area when thinking about residential components of a project. The idea, however, is to avoid office parks that are closed at night and to result in projects with good urban design characteristics and strong connections to neighborhoods.
- Chuck Eisenberg and Jerry Adams also reported on the discussions of the Finance Subcommittee, which is seeking to emphasize and quantify the financial (i.e. tax) benefits that these mixed-use projects will provide to the City. Jerry explained that while quantifying revenue is relatively easy (look at property taxes generated), it is more difficult to quantify the costs that a project will impart on the City. Even leaving the discussion of school



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children aside, there is still a need to consider the extra marginal cost of new projects vs. the average cost of new projects. The sub-committee has initial numbers that the net revenue to the City from these projects could be \$13million annually, which would make a significant dent in the City's structural deficit.

- There has been a great deal of discussion on the task force about the costs of school children (re: the housing component of mixed-use projects). John Pears noted that it would surely seem to be a natural, generational progression—as “empty nester” couples move out of single-family homes to small units and families with children move into single-family homes—not necessarily resulting in a massive influx of schoolchildren.
- On Thursday, June 29th at 7:30pm at the Newton Senior Center, the MMUTF will host a public meeting/open house which all are encouraged to attend.

4. EDC Evaluative Process

- Chris Steele distributed and presented the draft document “Guidelines for Addressing the Newton Economic Development Commission,” which is designed to assist developers in addressing their comments when they present to the EDC. Eventually, this could be posted on the City website.
- Chris Steele will email the document to the EDC and comments should be directed to him as soon as possible.

5. Other Project Updates

a. Austin Street

- Chuck Eisenberg noted that he formally recused himself from future discussions because of an interest in the project.
- Question about whether the June 30th deadline was firm, how many teams had replied to the RFI, and if/when the City would release an RFP?

b. Chestnut Hill Square

- New England Development has submitted plans for review by Eve Tapper, the Chief Zoning Code Official. The current plans show that the developer seeks to use the regular BU-4 zoning, rather than the special PMBD zoning that was developed expressly for that site.
- Members expressed hope that the results of the Mayors Mixed-Use Task Force might influence development on this site, but also expressed extreme disapproval of a design that is not ambitious enough in developing the site. Some members believe that the current plans will forever prevent the site from fulfilling its destiny and that, even though the economy is poor now, projects should be designed in such a way that when the economy improves, the project can do more.
- The Commission discussed how and when the EDC should evaluate projects and wants to evaluate projects at the appropriate time in the special permit process.

c. Needham Street

- Amanda Stout explained that Mayor Warren, together with the Town Manager of Needham, recently submitted a letter to MA Department of Housing and Community Development Secretary Greg Bialecki requesting funding and support of planning, transportation, and



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economic development work on Needham Street, emphasizing the regional significance of the corridor.

- Chris Steele raised the issue of regional economic development agencies, which he thinks are relevant here.
- Daphne Collins met with Mayor Warren and said that the Mayor was very positive about economic development and wants to drop in at an EDC meeting.

d. Newton Centre

- Discussion of the Firefighters' Triangle – interesting idea and good to bring focus back to Newton Centre, but question whether this particular project should be considered in the context of the rest of Newton Centre rather than in isolation and within the Real Property Reuse established process.
- Daphne Collins reported that the Mayor is interested in the discussion around the Cypress Street lot; he likes that it provides parking and is part of an opportunity to look at the whole Newton Centre area. According to Collins, the Mayor wanted to have a full assessment and understanding of the budgetary implications of the Newton Centre Fire Station before exploring any development options at the Newton Centre Triangle.
- Jerry Adams and John Pears reported that Ald. Danberg has helped get all three concerned property owners together to discuss the possibilities for the site. A group has been meeting and brainstorming ideas for a parking structure, apartments, retail, and open space.

e. Riverside

- Peter Lew attended the Community Meeting held by the developer on June 17th. He was not at the EDC meeting, but he emailed the meeting hand-out to the EDC. Members were familiar with the hand-out, presentation, and recent news articles about the project.
- John Pears mentioned that the developer has reached out to Newton Villages and has responded to some of the group's comments. One of Newton Villages' main concerns was the lack of public space around the T station.
- This site is part of the current discussion of the Mayor's Mixed Use Task Force. Some suggested that if the development process is made more predictable as a result of the task force, then perhaps it would attract a better development for Newton.

6. Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

- Daphne Collins and Amanda Stout reported on a meeting they recently attended (along with Matt Cuddy and others from Newton) sponsored by Emmy Hahn of the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development with the directors of several BIDs in the state (Hyannis, Northampton, Springfield, Westfield).
- Daphne Collins explained that the impetus for creating a BID needs to come from the private sector and that there might be an opportunity for the EDC to get involved in terms of educating the public and the business community about BIDs (and preventing misinformation from spreading). There are currently various discussions taking place by various people around the City regarding BIDs—in Newton Centre, along Needham Street, with the Chamber of Commerce, through Newton Villages, with banks, etc.



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- It was also mentioned that the Town of Natick presents an interesting example of using tax revenue from new development to fund improvements to Natick Center.

7. Other

- Bruce Gold noted that, after his term expires at the end of August, he will be leaving his post on the EDC as he will be moving out of Newton.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Amanda Stout

Sr. Economic Development Planner